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Pillar-stone at Kilnasaggart, front view.

THE PILLAR-STONE OF KILNASAGGART.

BY THE REV. GEORGE H. READE.

In compliance with a wish expressed by the Hon. Secretary of the Society, that I should visit the ancient monolith at Kilnasaggart, justly considered one of the most interesting remains of the ancient Christianity of Ireland, I availed myself of the kind hospitality of our noble associate, Lord Clermont, of Ravensdale Park, in whose neighbourhood it stands, to make the close examination which was asked for. Its position has already been sufficiently described by others (see “*Ulster Journal of Archæology*,” vol. i., p. 221),¹ and the nature of the inscription in front investigated; but no notice has been taken of the more ancient inscription upon the back and one of the sides, or of the very remarkable circles of graves, now nearly obliterated, which lie at its base; the crosses also upon it are not, as stated, in relief, or raised, but *incised*, and the stone at its foot is perfectly circular. I accept the interpretation given by Dr. O'Donovan, viz. that, “Ternoc Mac Ciaran consecrated this place, under the patronage of Peter the Apostle,”—although the second line looks exceedingly like the word $\text{I} \text{B} \text{C} \text{C} \text{N} \text{I}$, and we know the monkish sculptors often mixed Latin and Irish words together, as indeed is evident here, in the use of the word $\text{I} \text{O} \text{C}$ for place. However, I venture my opinion of the story told by this lone stone with much diffidence. I believe it to have been primarily a Pagan pillar-stone, marking the place of idolatrous rites and sacrifices; as also a druidical burial-ground. It bore originally a long inscription in Ogham upon one face, and also upon one of its sides, either a dedication to the druidical deity, or the record of the deeds of some hero, or perhaps the charter of some Pagan privileges annexed to the spot. Upon the conversion of the inhabitants to Christianity by St. Ternoc Mac Ciaran, the Pagan Ogham character was obliterated, at least so far as to destroy the power of ever deciphering its nature; enough of the original inscription being left to show that there had been a long Ogham upon it, while part of it was hammered off in such a manner as to prove a design in the mode of obliteration. The stone was then covered with crosses, as the symbols of the triumph of Christianity, and by the inscription on the other face, re-dedicated to that faith, so that it appears to be a witness of somewhat similar nature to the

¹ The Rev. William Reeves, D. D., the author of the article above referred to, gives the following reading of the inscription:—IN
 loc so oō thimmaerni ter-
 nohc maccerni bit er cul
 peter apstel, which Dr. O'Dono-

van thus translates: *τὸν locum hunc consecravit Ternocus filius Cerani sit sub patrocinio Petri Apostoli*. St. Ternoc, according to the Annals of Tighernach, died in the year 716; and the pillar-stone is plainly contemporary with the saint.—Eps.

Ogham stone found in St. Declan's oratory,—yet attesting much more, for that merely proves the triumph of Christianity by a silent inference, being taken from its upright position as a pillar-stone, and used simply as a building-stone in the Christian edifice, the Ogham inscription remaining perfect, and no symbol or mark inscribed, whereby it might be supposed that those who took it from its former position as a pillar-stone viewed it in any other light than as a good building-stone for the new oratory :—whereas this not only exhibits the Ogham battered away ; but the numerous crosses, the re-dedication, as well as its altered position, prove that it was selected as a witness for the eternal memory of the triumph of Christianity over Pagan Druidism.

A reference to the drawings here engraved,¹ and for the exact accuracy of which I pledge myself, will tell much more at a glance than I have yet been able to convey. In the plate which faces this page, the Ogham inscription is seen running down the centre of the stone, which appears to have been slightly bevelled from the centre to each side, so that the centre line of the bevil formed the *fleasg* line of the Ogham ; one side of this has been rudely hammered away ; and also, as I conceive, several cuts, or lines, some long, and some short, inclining at various angles, drawn through the original Ogham, so as to confuse the writing, and render it impossible even to guess the meaning of the Pagan inscription.² Above the Ogham several crosses contained in circles were then engraved, surmounted by a plain cross without a circle. And that these are posterior to the Ogham, and its destruction by violence, appears evident, not merely because the introduction of the Christian religion into Ireland was subsequent to the druidical superstition, but from the fact that a cross is engraved on the broken portion of the stone at top, roughly inscribed on the natural fracture of the stone, without any attempt at smoothing a surface for the purpose, where, perhaps, a too violent zeal had done greater damage than was intended.

This stone still stands at the head of a very peculiar cemetery (a ground plan of which will be found engraved at page 317), resembling those that are usually considered to be Pagan burial-grounds. The pillar is placed at the northern edge of a circle of 55 feet in diameter, the circumference of which is formed by a number of low flat graves, radiating thence towards the centre. An inner circle of much smaller graves then occurs, concentric with the outer ; the very centre of these two circles of graves is indicated

¹ The Society is much indebted to the liberality of one of its Members, Lord Clermont, who has defrayed the expense of the three engravings which serve to illustrate this Paper.

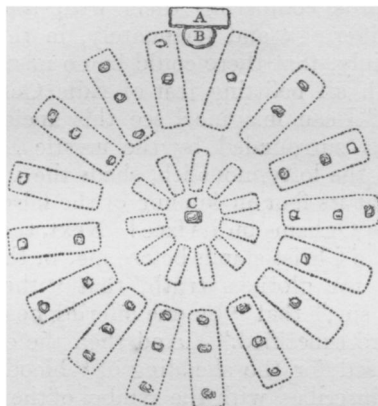
² It will be interesting to many to be informed that the late, and lamented, Richard

Hitchcock—no mean authority on Ogham questions—did not consider the scores on the side and back of this stone to have been Ogham writing ; in his opinion they were formed in the process of sharpening the tools with which the inscription and crosses were sculptured.—Eds.



Pillar-stone at Kilnasaggart, back view.

by the remnant of a stone shaft, or small pillar. At the foot of the large pillar-stone lies a round, slightly disked stone, not unlike those found in New Grange, but much smaller; *it also*, as having been



once used for Pagan purposes, is inscribed with the symbol of the triumphant faith.

That those Pagan pillar-stones were thus treated by the primitive Christians, in their zeal for the new faith, is not only a thing likely in itself to happen, but we have positive proof of the very fact, quoted by O'Flaherty from the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick ("Ogygia," part iii., p. 293):—"St. Patrick erected, in the plains of Moy-slola, Domnachmor Cathedral, and had the sacred name of Christ inscribed, in three languages, *on three pillars which had been raised there in the ages of idolatry, in commemoration of some transaction of Pagan rites.*"

The whole stone is covered with a close-growing thin lichen, seeming almost part of the substance of the stone, so that at a first view it appears altogether impossible to read any portion of the inscription. Perhaps I may be permitted to detail the mode by which I obtained the letters; and which are shown in their true form in the drawing which faces page 315. The day upon which I visited the pillar was very showery, and the moment the paper was applied to the inscription, the stone, which was quite wet, softened it; and a brisk gale, blowing right upon that face of the pillar, drove the moistened paper well into the marks of the inscription, so that it appeared tolerably plain without any rubbing whatever. I then applied some very soft and succulent grass, which I brought for the purpose, and obtained an excellent rubbing. On removing the paper, I traced each letter on the stone with a large broad-pointed red-lead pencil. Wherever the point

of the pencil would not run freely, I stopped, even although some fractures, arising from age, or accident, would seem to indicate the position of a letter. I then, without looking at the rubbing, copied the letters, as shown by the red pencil-marks, into my sketch-book, and upon afterwards comparing them with the rubbing, found but two letters differing; and fortunately, in those two the rubbing spoke so plainly, that there could be no mistake.

And now, with all befitting fear of Edie Ochiltree's "I mind the bigging o' it," I can imagine I see this ancient burial place—its circular graves, surrounded by the mystic Druids, while the archpriest, before the lofty monolith, sheds the victim's blood into the shallow basin at its foot in honour of the false god, whose law is recorded in rude Oghams on its face! Next, the solitary missionary of the Gospel of Christ stands before me, in this wild, mountain pass, proclaiming the glorious truth, that "the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin;" that "by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." And then the ensanguined stone basin no longer used for the shedding of "blood which can never take away sin" is inscribed with the symbol of the Christian faith—the Pagan law is obliterated—the witness stone "Ed" (Josh. xxii. 34, and xxiv. 27) becomes the witness "for eternal memory" of a "better covenant founded upon better promises."
